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## AN HOUR WITH THE LEXICOGRAPHERS.

By the Editor

THE progress of the English language is illustrated in the constantly increasing size of our Dictionaries. Thus, the first work, the "*Promptorium Parvulorum*," of Richard Fraunces, 1499, contained about two thousand words, regarded then as *English*. The "*Expositor*," of Dr. John Bullokar, 1616, contained about five thousand words. Bailey's "*English Dictionary and Interpreter of Hard Words*," contained, in its last (24th) edition, edited by Dr. Harwood, 1782, about twenty-three thousand words. Johnson's celebrated work, 1755, embraced about as many words as the contemporary editions of Bailey's book, but received constant additions with each new issue, until that edited by Rev. Henry John Todd, in 1814, added fourteen thousand words to its vocabulary, making about thirty-three thousand words. (Some authorities say fifty thousand, but even the latest editions of that *opus magnus* does not reach that figure.) Since Johnson's time, the new words and changes of meaning introduced into the language, have increased so rapidly, that our last dictionary, Dr. Worcester's unabridged, contains, it is said, one hundred and four thousand words, with fully defined definitions! At this rate of progress, in the year 1960, we shall claim one hundred and eighty thousand words as necessary to a complete English vocabulary! Who will ever try to make use of such a mountain of words?

But, though there are so many words now recognized as English, it is a remarkable fact that a comparatively small number suffices for the best writers. Mr. George P. Marsh estimates that Milton restricts his speech to eight thousand, and Shakespeare to fifteen thousand words, and these two writers, probably, have "wreaked thought upon expression" more completely than any author who has yet written in our language. Mr. Marsh further states that, in the ordinary converse and pen labors of our most active men, the number of words used does not average more than four thousand.

That composition or speech is most effective which contains the most direct, terse, Saxon expression; and those writers are most pleasing, to all classes, whose

vocabulary is confined to simples, rather than to compounds and derivatives. The very perfection of rhetorical beauty, is embodied in the writings of Goldsmith, Addison, Steele, and yet how simple is their vocabulary! Washington Irving often is named the "American Goldsmith," but the parallel is only a good one so far as it refers to his exquisitely plain expression. Bryant uses remarkably few words in his compositions—prose or verse—and certainly no poet writes with greater acceptance to the intelligence of our country.

The moral of this to aspirants for the honors of the pen or forum, is plain.

We have in our possession a Bailey Dictionary—the octavo edition, edited by Dr. Harwood, in 1782. It is peculiarly interesting, as showing the earlier signification of words—many of which are now used in a sense totally diverse from their first application. Dean Trench, in his most admirable little books—"On the Study of Words," and "English, Past and Present"—illustrates these changes and substitutions in a very interesting manner, biographically and philologically.

Bailey says, for instance, of *politician*, that its signification is a *statesman*; but it is evident that it was, at an earlier date, used in an offensive sense, for South, in his "Sermons" (1744), says: "The politician, whose very essence lies in this, that *he is a person ready to do anything that he apprehends for his advantage*," etc., etc. Would it not be somewhat singular if this old meaning should again attach to the word? We now understand politician to mean, *not* a statesman, but one who spends his time in *partisan* discussion; and it is fast having an odium attached to it, in the estimation of a large body of the people.

*Mob* is not given place in the English Encyclopædia (1795-1801), although it is known to have originated in the latter days of the reign of Charles II. Addison characterized it as a "ridiculous expression." Notwithstanding, it has become a very useful and significant appellation for an offensive crowd.

*Roudy* is admitted to Worcester, and marked "low"—Mr. Bartlett being quoted as authority for it. It is not given in Bailey, Johnson, or Richardson.

*Ruffian* now implies a brutal fellow, but its early and correct signification is a pimp—one who abets the traffic between sexes—a sense in which it is now rarely

used. As we have the words "scoundrel," "cut-throat," "villain," "assassin," "robber," "rascal," etc., etc., to imply a brutal fellow, it would be well to use *ruffian* in its early sense, and thus discard the very disgusting word *pimp*.

*Blackguard* was derived from black guard, i. e.: the guard of scullions who always watched over the pots and kettles of a travelling household. Thus, Webster, in his "White Devil," says: "A lousy slave, that, within these twenty years, rode with the black guard in the Duke's carriage, mongst spits and dripping pans." It is easy to conceive how the term came to apply to any low fellow who sought to blacken others characters.

The words *base*, *brat*, *caitiff*, *lewd*, *wench*, *idiot*, *gossip*, *dunce*, were once used in vastly different senses from that which now attaches to them. "Base men" used to be simply persons of humble degree. A "brat" once was synonymous with *brood* or *children*. Thus, Gascoigne says:

"O Abraham's brats—O brood of blessed seed."

"Caitiff" and "captive" were synonyms in Chaucer's time. "Lewd" once implied merely *unwelcomed*. "Idiot" (Gr. *idiōtēs*) first signified a private citizen. "Gossip" used to mean a *sponsor at baptism*.

Is it not somewhat strange that the word *clumsy* does not occur in Shakespeare's works? It is not a modern word, by any means. Bailey thinks it is probably from the Dutch *clompsch*; Richardson derives it from *klomp*.

The word *civilization*, it is generally stated, is of recent origin. Dean Trench says of it: "Johnson does not know it, in his Dictionary, except as a technical legal term, to express the turning of a criminal process into a civil one, and, according to Boswell, altogether disallowed it in the sense it has now acquired." It does not occur in Bailey's work; and yet, Worcester quotes Bishop Hare as authority for its present meaning. As the bishop flourished in time of Queen Anne, and died A. D. 1740—fifteen years before the publication of Johnson's Dictionary—we cannot conclude, with Dean Trench, that the word is of recent admission to our vocabulary, in its *refined* sense. It is a noble word.

*Starvation* is of comparatively recent origin, forming a rare instance of a Latin termination to a pure English root. It is not found in Bailey or Johnson, nor in Richardson's first work, though given in

his supplement. Horace Walpole thus states its origin and introduction: "It was first introduced into the English language by Mr. Dundas (Lord Melville), in a speech, in 1775, on an American debate, and hence applied to him as a nickname, viz.: *Starvation Dundas*." When Dean Trench, therefore, charges that the word is strictly an Americanism, he is in error. It was admitted into Webster's books, but was not used in this country, so far as we can discover, before its adoption by Mr. Dundas, as above stated. The word *starve*, in this country, is almost invariably applied to perishing by *hunger*; whereas, its correct signification implies to perish by *hunger or cold*. Hence, it is always proper to say starved with hunger; and the critic who recently charged tautology upon an author for using the expression "starved of hunger," was not only hypercritical, but somewhat ignorant.

The word *editorial* is quite a new candidate for admission to Lexicon honors. It does not appear as a substantive noun in any dictionary, we believe; and yet is used almost daily, by the best scholars and writers, as meaning the article prepared by the editor. It is given by Worcester only as an adjective.

*Humiliating*, Johnson would not admit to his category of English words. Bailey admits *humiliation*, *humiliate*, *humility*. Worcester gives it, and quotes Adam Smith for authority.

Such words as *oviparity*, *solidarity*, *peoples*, *telegram*, *revolver*, *gorilla*, *Grahamite*, *outsider*, *humbug*, *reliable*, *placer*, *nugget*, *crinoline*, etc., etc., are of quite recent origin. *Humbug*, it is true, is used by Fielding, 1751, but only of late came to be recognized as a legitimate term to imply an imposition. Probably to P. T. Barnum (the "great American showman") we are indebted for the *popularity* of the word.

The expressions *buncombe*, *comeouter*, *outsider*, are recognized by Worcester, but, though they are popular terms, it is to be doubted if good authority exists to warrant their introduction as proper and recognized words. Each new political campaign introduces new terms and phrases to popular usage—some of them very expressive, it is true; but our "well of English undefiled" will soon become grossly defiled if lexicographers and good writers allow such words a place in their vocabulary. Worcester does not recognize *shyster*, *garroter*, *roughs*, etc., yet we

think them quite as well authenticated as "outsider," "comeouter," etc.

*Esemplastic* is a word coined by Coleridge, in his "Biographiæ Literaria." We observe that Worcester has admitted it, although we doubt if he can cite any authority for its use. No writer has adopted it, so far as we are aware. Coleridge was so much of a Græco-German, that his "magnificent monologues" used to embody many a high-sounding word more Coleridgean than authorized English. *Esemplastic* is one of his own words, though a very good one, it must be confessed.

A word of very strong import is *miscreant*. Yet it once only implied an unbeliever, and was generally applied by the Crusaders to the Moslem foe. By degrees it came to imply something of dislike; and passion was not long in affixing a stigma to the term.

A case wherein an originally offensive meaning has been turned into one of pleasant import, is found in the words "Yankee," "Whig," "Tory," "Puritan," "Quaker," "Methodist"—all of which were bestowed upon persons and parties as nicknames. Constant repetition familiarized them, and they are now as dignified appellations as we have in the language.

Dean Trench says of *pretentious*: "This adjective of 'pretence' is a word at the present moment (1851) forcing its way into existence—is now displeasing enough to delicate ears, yet, no doubt, it will keep its ground, for it supplies a real need. In a very little while multitudes will use it, quite unconscious that it is not older, nor, perhaps, as old as they are themselves." This prediction was fulfilled almost ere it gained circulation; for, so fixed a fact is it that, in Worcester, it seems like an old resident.

Some of our hypercritics object strongly to the use of the word *jeopardize*. One writer pronounces it a "verbal monstrosity;" another demands that it shall be expunged from the English lexicon because it is only used in America! What an expurgation we Americans would have to undergo to get rid of everything "American" in our daily habits, our converse, and our very thoughts. If no better reason can be urged for its banishment than that it is only used in this country, we vote, by all means, to keep it on the record! But, it is not true that it is only in use here: good writers in Eng-

land adopt it. Nor is it a very "modern invention," as even Worcester would have us infer. In Bailey it is distinctly given (1782), in its several forms, viz.: "jeopard," "jeopardy," "jeoparden," "jeoperdise," "jeoperdously." "Jeoparden" was used in the sense of our word *jeopardize*, viz.: to put into jeopardy. Emerson, in his article "Culture," in the "Atlantic Monthly" for September, says: "A considerate man will shun every expenditure of his forces on pleasure or gain, which will jeopardize this social and secular accumulation." How much more forcible than to have used the apparent synonyms "peril," "risk," "put in danger," "hazard," etc., etc. The objection to the word, that the verb *jeopard* fully covers the ground, is entitled to the consideration of purists, and those who declare against all innovation.

We have, in very common use, a large number of expressions—they can hardly be classed as words—which are amusing compounds of various roots and simples, with ludicrous ideas or figurative meaning. Some are given the sanction of the lexicographers—some not; but, whether recognized or not as "good English," they are a *power* in the language of the people, and, sooner or later, will be conceded their place and position in the great array of words which make up the English language proper. Such are *hocus-pocus*, *tip-top*, *helter-skelter*, *hubbub*, *knick-knack*, *hobnob*, *slip-slop*, *hodge-podge*, *fl.m-flam*, *harum-scarum*, *riff-raff*, *rowdy-dowdy*, *fiddle-faddle*, *chit-chat*, *namby-pamby*, *hugger-mugger*, *higgledy-piggledy*, *flip-flap*, *rub-a-dub*, *hurdy-gurdy*, *hurly-burly*, etc., etc. The origin of these words is to be traced to popular vulgarisms or contractions, in most instances, though good authority, as Shakespeare, Pope, the "Spectator" papers, is not wanting for their sanction. Worcester gives most of them.

We might extend this paper to much greater length than the limits of these pages would permit—so prolific is the theme. Many thousand words have *biographies* which it would be very pleasant and profitable to trace. Few persons have any idea that there is true romance in the *lives* of words; they have only to spend a season with lexicographers and philologists to find how truly *moral* is the history of our daily vocabulary. In some future paper we may recur to this theme, and spend another hour with the dictionaries.